

The Ball of Fire

by GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER and LILLIAN CHESTER

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SYNOPSIS.

At a vestry meeting of the Market Square church, Gail Sargent listens to a discussion about the sale of the church tenements to Edward E. Allison, local traction king, and when asked her opinion of the church by Rev. Smith Boyd, she says it is apparently a lucrative business enterprise. Allison takes Gail riding in his motor car. When he suggests he is entitled to rest on the laurels of his achievements, she asks the disturbing question: "Why?" Gail, returning to her Uncle Jim's home from her drive with Allison, finds cold disapproval in the eyes of Rev. Smith Boyd, who is calling there. At a boisterous party Gail finds the world uncomfortably full of men, and Allison tells Jim Sargent that his new ambition is to conquer the world. Allison starts a campaign for consolidation and control of the entire transportation system of the world.

CHAPTER V—Continued.

He allowed himself four hours for sleep that night, and the next afternoon headed for Denver. On the way he studied maps again, but the one to which he paid most attention was a new one drawn by himself, on which the various ranges of the Rocky Mountains were represented by scrawled, lead-penciled spirals. Right where his thin line crossed these spirals at a converging point, was Yando chasm, a pass created by nature, which was the proud possession of the Inland Pacific, now the most prosperous and direct of all the Pacific systems; and the Inland, with an insolent pride in the natural fortune which had been found for it by the cleverest of all engineers, guarded its precious right of way as no jewel was ever protected. Just east of Yando chasm there crossed a little "one-horse" railroad, which, starting at the important city of Silverknob, served some good mining towns below the Inland's line, and on the north side curved up and around through the mountains, rambling wherever there was freight or passengers to be carried, and ending on the other side of the range at Nugget City, only twenty miles north of the Inland's main line, and a hundred miles west, into the fair country which sloped down to the Pacific. This road, which had its headquarters in Denver, was called the Silverknob and Nugget City; and into its meeting walked Allison, with control.

His course here was different from that in Jersey City. He ousted every director on the board, and elected men



"Couldn't Think of It," Declared Wilcox, Looking at the Map.

of his own. Immediately after, in the director's meeting, he elected himself president, and, kindly consenting to talk with the reporters of the Denver newspapers, hurried back to Chicago, where he drove directly to the head offices of the Inland Pacific.

"I've just secured control of the Silverknob and Nugget City," he informed the general manager of the Inland.

"So I noticed," returned Wilcox, who was a young man of fifty and wore picturesque velvet hats. "The papers here made quite a sensation of your going into railroad."

"They're welcome," grinned Allison. "Say Wilcox, if you'll build a branch from Pines to Nugget City, we'll give you our Nugget City freight where we cross, at Copperville, east of the range."

Wilcox headed for the map.

"What's the distance?" he inquired.

"Twenty-two miles; fairly level grade, and one bridge."

"Couldn't think of it," decided Wilcox, looking at the map. "We'd like to have your freight, for there's a lot of traffic between Silverknob and Nugget City, but it's not our territory. The smelters are at Silverknob, and they ship east over the White Range line. Anyway, why do you want to take away the haulage from your northern branch?"

"Figure on discontinuing it. The grades are steep, the local traffic is light, and the roadbed is in a rotten condition. It needs rebuilding through-

out. I'll make you another proposition. I'll build the line from Pines to Nugget City myself, if you'll give us track connection at Copperville and at Pines, and will give us a traffic contract for our rolling stock on a reasonable basis."

Again Wilcox looked at the map. The Silverknob and Nugget City road began nowhere and ran nowhere, so far as the larger transportation world was concerned, and it could never figure as a competitor. The hundred miles through the precious natural pass known as the Yando chasm was not so busy a stretch of road as it was important, and the revenue from the passage of the Silverknob and Nugget City's trains would deduct considerably from the expense of maintaining that much-prized key to the golden West.

"I'll take it up with Priestly and Gorman," promised Wilcox.

"How soon can you let me know?"

"Monday."

That afternoon saw Allison headed back for New York, and the next morning he popped into the offices of the Pacific Slope and Puget Sound, where he secured a rental privilege to run the trains of the Orange Valley road into San Francisco, and down to Los Angeles, over the tracks of the P. S. and P. S. The Orange Valley was a little, blind pocket of a road, which made a juncture with the P. S. and P. S. just a short haul above San Francisco, and it ran up into a rich fruit country, but its terminus was far, far away from any possible connection with a northwestern competitor, and that bargain was easy.

That night Allison, glowing with an exultation which erased his fatigue, dressed to call on Gail Sargent.

CHAPTER VI.

Had They Spoiled Her?

Music resounded in the parlors of Jim Sargent's house; music so sweet and compelling in its harmony that Aunt Grace slipped to the head of the stairs to listen in mingled ecstasy and pride. Up through the hallway floated a clear, mellow soprano and a rich, deep baritone, blended so perfectly that they seemed twin tones. Aunt Grace, drawn by a fascination she could not resist, crept down to where she could see the source of the melody. Gail, exceptionally pretty to-night in her simple dove-colored gown with its one pink rose, sat at the piano, while towering above her, with his chest expanded and a look of perfect peace on his face, stood Rev. Smith Boyd.

Enraptured, Aunt Grace stood and listened until the close of the ballad. Leaping through her music for the next treat, Gail looked up at the young doctor, and made some smiling remark. Her shining brown hair, waving about her forehead, was caught up in a simple knot at the back, and the delicate color of her cheeks was like the fresh glow of dawn. Rev. Smith Boyd bent slightly to answer, and he, too, smiled as he spoke; but as he happened to find himself gazing deep into the brown eyes of Gail, the smile began to fade, and Aunt Grace Sargent, scared, ran back up the stairs and into her own room, where she took a book, and held it in her lap, upside down. The remark which Gail had made was this:

"You should have used your voice professionally."

The reply of the rector was:

"I do."

"I didn't mean oratorically," she laughed, then returned nervously to her search for the next selection. She had seen that change in the smile. "It is so rare to find a perfect speaking voice coupled with a perfect singing voice," she rattled on. "Here's that simple little 'May Song.' Just harmony, that's all."

Once more their voices rose in that perfect blending which is the most delicate of all exhilarations. In the melody itself there was an appealing sympathy, and in that moment, these two were in as perfect accord as their voices. There is something in the music of the human tone which exerts a magnetic attraction like no other in the world; which breaks down the barriers of antagonism, which sweeps away the walls of self-entrenchment, which attracts and draws, which explains and does away with explanation. This was the first hour they had spent without a clash, and Rev. Smith Boyd, his eyes quite blue tonight, brought another stack of music from the rack.

The butler, an aggravating figure with only one joint in his body, paraded solemnly through the hall, and back again with the card tray, while Gail and the rector sang "Juanita" from an old college songbook, which the Reverend Boyd had discovered in high glee. Aunt Grace came down the stairs and out past the doors of the music salon. There were voices of animated greeting in the hall, and Aunt Grace returned to the door just as the rector was spreading open the book at "Sweet and Low."

"Pardon me," teased aunt.

"There's a little surprise out here for you."

A rush of noise filled the hall. Lucile and Ted Tensdale, handsome Dick Rodley and Arly Fosland and Houston Van Ploon, had come clattering in as an escort for Mrs. Davies, whose pet fad was to have as many young people as possible bring her home from any place.

"Where's the baby?" demanded handsome Dick Rodley, heading for the stairs.

"Silly, you mustn't!" cried Lucile, and started after him. "Flakes should be asleep at this hour."

"I came in for the sole purpose of teaching Flakes the turkey trot," declared handsome Dick, and ran away, followed by Lucile.

"Lucile's becoming passe," criticized Ted. "She's flirting with Rodney for the second time."

"Can you blame her?" defended Arly Fosland. She was sitting in the deep corner of her favorite couch, nursing a slender ankle, and even her shining black hair, to say nothing of her shining black eyes, seemed to be snapping with wicked delight.

Lucile and handsome Dick came struggling down the stairway with Flakes between them, and Gail sprang instantly to take the bewildered puppy from them both. Little blonde Lucile gave up her interest to the prior right, but Rodley pretended to be obstinate about it. His deep eyes burned down into Gail's, as he stood bending above her, and his smile, to Howard's concentrated gaze, had in it that dangerous fascination which few women could resist! Gail was positively smiling up into his eyes!

"Tableau!" called Ted. "All ready for the next reel."

"Hold it a while," begged Arly, and even Rev. Smith Boyd was forced to admit that the picture was handsome enough to be retained. The Adonis-like Dick, with his black hair and black eyes, his curly black mustache and his black goatee, his pink cheeks and his white teeth; Gail, gracefully erect, her head thrown back, her brown hair waving and her fluffy white Flakes between them; it was painfully beautiful.

"Children, go home," suddenly commanded Mrs. Davies. "Dick, put the dog back where you found it."

"I suppose we'll have to go home," drawled Ted. "Dick, put back that dog."

"Put away the dog, Dick," ordered the heavier voice of young Van Ploon. "Come along, Gail, I'll put him away."

At his approach, Dick placed the puppy, with great care, in Gail's charge, and took her arm. Van Ploon took her other arm, and together the trio, laughing, went away to return Flakes to his bed. They clung to her most affectionately, bending over her on either side; and they called her Gail!

The others were ready to go when they returned from the collie nursery, and the three young men stood for a moment in a row near the door. Gail looked them over with a puzzled expression. What was there about them which was so attractive? Was it poise, sureness, polish, breeding, experience, insolence, grooming—what? Even the stiff Van Ploon seemed smooth of bearing tonight!

They still were standing in the hall, and the front door opened.

"Brought you a prodigal," hailed Uncle Jim, slipping his latchkey in his pocket as he held the door open for the prodigal in question.

Gail was watching the doorway. Someone outside was vigorously stamping his feet. The prodigal came in, and proved to be Allison, buoyant of step, sparkling of eye, firm of jaw, and ruddy from the night wind. Smiling with the sureness of welcome, he came eagerly up to Gail, and took her hand, retaining it until she felt compelled to withdraw it, recognizing again that thrill. The barest trace of a flush came into her cheeks, and paled again.

Gail changed her garments and let down her waving hair, and, disdaining the help of her maid, performed all the little nightly duties, to the putting away of her clothing. Then, in a perfectly neat and orderly boudoir, she sat down to take herself seriously to hand.

There was a knock at the door and, on invitation, the tall and stately Mrs. Helen Davies came in, frilled and ruffled for the night. She found the dainty, little guest boudoir in green tinted dimness. Gail had turned down all the lights in the room except the green lamps under the canopy, and she sat on the divan, with her brown hair rippling about her shoulders, her knees clasped in her arms, and her dainty little boudoir slippers peeping from her flowing pink negligee, while the dim green light, suited to her present reflections, only enhanced the clear pink of her complexion. Mrs. Davies moved over to the other side of Gail, where she could surround her, and laid the brown head on her shoulder.

Gail, whose quick intelligence no movement escaped, lay comfortably on Aunt Helen's shoulder, and a clear laugh rippled out. She could not see the smile of satisfaction and relief with which Aunt Helen Davies received that laugh.

"My dear," I am quite well pleased with you," she said. "You have a brilliant future before you."

Gail's eyelids closed; the long, brown lashes curved down on her cheeks, revealing just a sparkle of brightness, while the mischievous little smile twitched at the corners of her lips.

"If you were an ordinary girl, I would urge you, tonight, to make a selection among the exceptionally excellent matrimonial material of which

you have a choice, but, with your extraordinary talents and beauty, my advice is just to the contrary. You should delay until you have had a wider opportunity for judgment. You have not as yet shown any marked preference, I hope."

"No, Aunt Helen."

"You are remarkably wise," complimented Aunt Helen, a bit of appreciation which quite checked Gail's impulse to giggle. "In the meantime, it is just as well to study your opportunities. Of course there's Dick Rodley, whom no one considers seriously, and Willis Cunningham, whose one and only drawback is such questionable health that he might persistently interfere with your social activities. Houston Van Ploon, I am frank to say, is the most eligible of all, and to have attracted his attention is a distinct triumph. Mr. Allison, while rather advanced in years—"

"Please!" cried Gail. "You'd think I was a horse."

"I know just how you feel," stated Aunt Helen, entirely unruffled; "but



She Sat With Her Brown Hair Rippling Around Her Shoulders.

you have your future to consider, and I wish to invite your confidence, and in her voice there was the quaver of much concern.

"Thank you, Aunt Helen," said Gail, realizing the sincerity of the older woman's intentions, and, putting her arms around Mrs. Davies' neck, she kissed her. "It is dear of you to take so much interest."

"I think it's pride," confessed Mrs. Davies, naively. "I won't keep you up a minute longer, Gail. Go to bed, and get all the sleep you can. Only sleep will keep those roses in your cheeks. Good-night," and with a parting caress she went to her own room, with a sense of a duty well performed.

Gail smiled retrospectively, and tried the blue light under the canopy lamp, but turned it out immediately. The green gave a much better effect of moonlight on the floor.

She called herself back out of the mists of her previous thought. Who was this Gail, and what was she? There had come a new need in her, a new awakening. Something seemed to have changed in her, to have crystallized. Whatever this crystallization was, it had made her know that marriage was not to be looked upon as a mere inevitable social episode. Her thoughts flew back to Aunt Helen. Her eyelashes brushed her cheeks, and the little smile of sarcasm twitched the corners of her lips.

Aunt Helen's list of eligibles; Gail reviewed them now deliberately; not with the thought of the social advantages they might offer her, but as men. She reviewed others whom she had met. For the first time in her life, she was frankly and self-consciously interested in men; curious about them. She had reached her third stage of development; the fairy prince age, the "I suppose I shall have to be married one day" age, and now the age of conscious awakening. She wondered, in some perplexity, as to what had brought about her nascent; rather, and she knitted her pretty brows, who had brought it about?

The library clock chimed the hour, and startled her out of her reverie. She turned on the lights, and sat in front of her mirror to give her hair one of those extra brushings for which it was so grateful, and which it repaid with so much beauty. She paused deliberately to study herself in the glass. Why, this was a new Gail, a more poised Gail. What was it Allison had said about her potentialities? Allison, Strong, forceful, aggressive Allison. He was potent himself. A thrill of his handclasp clung with her yet, and a slight flush crept into her cheeks.

Aunt Grace had worried about Jim's little cold, and the distant mouse she thought she heard, and the silver chest, and Lucile's dangerous-looking new horse, until all these topics had faded, when she detected the unmistakable click of a switch button near by. It must be in Gail's suite. Hadn't the child retired yet? She lay quite still pondering that mighty question for ten minutes, and then, unable to rest any longer, she slipped out of bed and across the hall. There was no light coming from under the doors of either the boudoir or the bedroom, so Aunt Grace peeped into the latter apartment, then she tiptoed softly away. Gail, in her cascade of pink tulle, was at the north window

kneeling, with her earnest face upturned to one bright, pale star.

CHAPTER VII.

Still Pleading Out the World.

The map of the United States in Edward E. Allison's library began, now, to develop little streaks, but they were boldly marked, and they hugged, with extraordinary closeness, the pencil mark which Allison had drawn from New York to Chicago and from Chicago to San Francisco. There were long gaps between them, but these did not seem to worry him very much. It was the little streaks, sometimes scarcely over an inch, which he drew with such evident pleasure from day to day, and now, occasionally, as he passed in and out, he stopped by the big globe and gave it a contemplative whirl. On the day he joined his far western group of little marks by bridging three small gaps, he received a caller in the person of a short, well-dressed old man, who walked with a cane and looked half asleep, by reason of the many puffs which had piled up under his eyes and nearly closed them.

"I'm ready to wind up, Tim," remarked Allison, offering his caller a cigar, and lighting one himself. "When can we have that Vedder Court property condemned?"

"Whenever you give the word," reported Tim Corman, who spoke with an asthmatic voice, and with the quiet dignity of a man who had borne grave business responsibilities, and had borne them well.

Allison nodded his head in satisfaction.

"You're sure there can't be any hitch in it?"

"Not if I say it's all right," and the words were Tim's only reproof. His tone was perfectly level, and there was no glint in his eyes. Offended dignity had nothing to do with business. "Give me one week's notice, and the Vedder Court property will be condemned for the city terminal of the Municipal Transportation company. Appraisal, thirty-one million."

"I only wanted to be reassured," apologized Allison. "I took your word that you could swing it when I made my own gamble, but now I have to drag other people into it."

"That's right," agreed Tim. "I never get offended over straight business." In other times Tim Corman would have said "get sore," but, as he neared the end of his years of useful activity, he was making quite a specialty of refinement, and stocking a picture gallery, and becoming a connoisseur collector of rare old jewels. He dressed three times a day.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

VAGUE AS TO CAUSES OF WAR

Anecdotes Would Seem to Reveal Confusion of the Average Irish Mind.

In many districts of Ireland there are practically no books and almost nobody reads newspapers. For months there were people in Ireland who thought England was fighting on the same side as Germany.

Here is an illustration of popular ignorance of which I have personal knowledge.

A group of villagers were in a blacksmith shop, discussing the news. Finally one asked: "And how did this bloody war begin?"

"The blacksmith was the scholar of the gathering. 'You see,' said he, 'it was like this. The king of the Servitudes took a woman of the Morgans to wife, and so the Servitudes killed them both and that is the way the thing began.'"

Which, after all, is much after the manner of Herodotus.

Still confining myself to incidents that I know to be true I will add another anecdote to illustrate the way the Irish mind takes hold of an international situation. A man was defending himself for having fought with the British troops against the Boers. He explained that he started to join the Boers, but that he could not get through the lines, so he joined the British.

"You should not have done that," said one.

"Ah," said the narrator, "I would have given me soul for a fight."—Norman Hapgood in Harper's Weekly.

Fish Gas.

At Fray-Bentos, in the Argentine, is the largest kitchen in the world. Here beef extract is made—40 pounds of beef give one pound of extract. And here, up to 1900, all the waste—all the entrails and fat and so forth—got thrown into the River Plata.

The waste of 1,000 bullocks thrown daily into the Plata brought the fish up from the sea to Fray-Bentos in unbelievable thousands. Boats could hardly advance for the silver waves of fish. These fish could be caught with shovels, with scoops, with the hand.

The people of Fray-Bentos, in the unparalleled abundance of the Argentine, varied their free beef with free fish, and in addition ground up daily fish enough to light the entire district with fish gas, a very clear illuminant made from fish oil.

But today they utilize at Fray-Bentos every part of the bullock but the bellows. Consequently the fish millions of the past have deserted the river, and fish gas, that romantic illuminant, has been supplanted by vulgar electricity.

Quite True.

"Why did you lead me to believe the astronomer I met was a flash writer?"

"Because he is a flash writer—he is an authority on meteors."

THE EUROPEAN WAR A YEAR AGO THIS WEEK

Sept. 20, 1914.

Allies captured Souain. Belgians retook Lanaeken. Germans brought big siege guns up to Antwerp.

Russians took Jaroslav and began bombardment of fortress of Przemyel.

General Hindenburg began movement against Grodno, Russian Poland.

Germans defeated by Russians near Sandomierz.

Serbs defeated Austrians near Novi-Bazar.

German cruiser Koenigsberg disabled British cruiser Pegasus in Zanzibar harbor.

Six British ships taken by German cruiser Emden.

Austrian torpedo boat sunk at Pola.

German merchant cruiser Cap Trafalgar sunk by the Garmania.

Sept. 21, 1914.

Germans bombarded Antwerp forts.

Allies took Massiges and Mesnil between Reims and Argonne.

Serbs defeated Austrians at Kroupina, but evacuated Semlin.

Russians took Dublecko and surrounded General Dank's army.

German cruiser Emden sank British steamer Clan Matheson.

Japanese aviators wrecked two forts at Tsingtau.

German official statement of destruction of Louvain issued.

French foreign office protested to neutrals on bombardment of Reims cathedral.

Russia issued its Orange Book.

Sept. 22, 1914.

Germans captured Croonne.

German right turned between Peronne and St. Quentin.

Austrians defeated on the Drina.

Australians seized German wireless station on island of Nauru.

Germans repulsed in attack on fort in Vol district, Africa.

German submarines sank British cruisers Aboukir, Cressy and Hogue in North sea.

Sept. 23, 1914.

Germans bombarded Verdun.

Allies advanced left wing near Lassigny.

Russians took Wislok.

Cossacks raided Czenstochowa.

Russian cruiser Boyar sank German cruiser and two torpedo boats.

British aviators dropped bombs on Zeppelin plant at Dusseldorf.

Sept. 24, 1914.

French took Peronne.

Varennes captured by Germans.

Russians again occupied Soldau.

Russian advanced guard arrived before Cracow.

Germans defeated at Subin.

British troops landed near Laosan, China.

Germans at Schuckmannsburg, Africa, surrender.

Two Austrian torpedo boats and one destroyer sunk by mines in Adriatic.

German cruiser Emden bombarded Madras.

Anglo-French fleet bombarded Cattaro.

Canada's contingent of 32,000 men sailed.

German aviators dropped bombs on Ostend.

Sept. 25, 1914.

Allies attacked Germans at St. Quentin, but were repulsed.

Germans advanced southeast of Verdun.

Snow halted campaign in Alsace.

Russians occupied Czeschky and Felstyn.

Population of Cracow fled.

Serbs and Austrians fought battle near Zvorkni.

Australian force took German New Guinea.

Kronprinz Wilhelm sank British steamer Indian Prince.

Belgian and German aviators in duel over Brussels.

Germans again shelled Reims cathedral.

Formal complaint of German atrocities filed in Washington.

There are over 2,500 women commercial "drummers" in the United States.

The Library.

From that waste water of endless space and time, the dome of a library shuts us in to the warm little world of literature, charged with human thought and feeling. . . . The good, the true and the beautiful are something real and ascertainable.—Paul Shorey.

Daily Thought.

Nothing but the harmony of friendship soothes our sorrows; without its sympathy there is no happiness on earth.—Mozart.